

## **Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Dorrian via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq**

Press Operations

Colonel John Dorrian, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman  
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STAFF: Good afternoon. And thank you for all coming at this later time. We, as you know, moved the schedule today to accommodate the briefing by Admiral Harris at the House Armed Services Committee. And, J.D., I know, for the -- for you, that means likely missing dinner, and we appreciate your sacrifice to allow for that, so our reporters could cover both of these important briefings today.

We want to turn over to you in a moment, ladies and gentlemen, Colonel John Dorrian, the spokesperson for Operation Inherent Resolve, joining us live from Baghdad. J.D. -- J.D., over to you.

COLONEL JOHN DORRIAN: All right, very good. Good afternoon, all. We'll start with the Syria update, and then discuss progress in Iraq.

As you know, Turkey conducted airstrikes in northern Syria's Hasakah province the night before last, resulting in the loss of life of our partnered forces in the fight against ISIS.

In the last 48 hours, the same partnered forces in the southern part of the country, the SDF and the Syrian Arab Coalition, continued their relentless campaign to isolate Raqqa, clearing more than 215 square kilometers of territory in Ops Box North of the city, where they were able to link forces fighting from east and west, and then back-clear the pocket created by the link-up.

The SDF also continues making progress in Tabqa city, where they're controlling the tempo of operations against tough resistance and pushing ISIS into an ever-shrinking area.

They accomplish this progress despite fierce counterattacks by fighters in the city as ISIS recognize the extent to which Raqqa is being isolated by the SDF and SAC operations.

Our partners are making tremendous sacrifices in this very difficult and dangerous fight against ISIS. They have done so in Manbij, and they continue to do so in the countryside around Raqqa this very day.

COL. DORRIAN: Of course, the coalition air support has been an instrumental component of the SDF's advance into this dense terrain, suppressing the enemy's ability to retain their positions, destroying ISIS fighting positions, headquarters, weapons and resources. We will continue that support.

Moving on to Iraq. The Iraqi Security Forces continue making progress in isolating and clearing territory from a dense urban terrain of Mosul despite ISIS resistance and brutal control measures against civilians who remain in the city.

Yesterday the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service cleared the al-Tenek neighborhood, one of Mosul's largest. The neighborhood was important to the enemy as a command and control site and was a location the enemy used to keep a lot of weapons and resources.

Unfortunately, we continue to see reports of ISIS actions to terrorize and control the remaining civilians in the city. As many of you know, the enemy uses the Al-Bayan radio network to broadcast to their fighters and to the people of Mosul. And despite the fact that many of these sites have been overrun and dismantled by the Iraqi Security Forces, they've maintained an intermittent ability to broadcast into both east and west Mosul.

Certainly, such messages are disconcerting to civilians who remain in the west or have returned to their home in the east because of the brutal treatment. But the city is completely surrounded and ISIS is losing territory every day. It's only a matter of time before the Al-Bayan network is silenced in Mosul forever.

As you've seen, the strikes that the Turkish Air Force conducted last night also killed several Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in this vicinity of Sinjar. The strikes were conducted without proper coordination with the coalition or the government of Iraq. We're troubled by that.

We call on all forces to remain focused on the fight to defeat ISIS, which is the greatest threat to regionally and worldwide peace and security. The coalition continues using precision air strikes, including nine yesterday to remove ISIS fighters, snipers, weapons caches, vehicle-born improvised explosive devices and other targets from the battlefield anywhere that they can be found and struck with precision in Mosul and other areas around Iraq.

And now, I'm pleased to answer your questions.

STAFF: And we'll start with Missy Ryan from the Washington Post.

Q: Hi, colonel. Missy Ryan, here. Thanks.

I have a couple follow-up questions on the Turkey strikes. First of all, can you provide us an estimate of how many YPG, or Peshmerga, or PKK people were killed in those airstrikes?

Secondly, how much nervous did the United States get about those strikes and how much time ahead of time were -- was the United States notified? And do you have anything on reports of any new strikes -- or -- either air or artillery across the Syrian border from Turkey into Syria by -- by the Turkish government? Thank you.

COL. DORRIAN: OK. In order, out of respect for our partners, we're not going to give out their casualty numbers. That's something that they must do.

So, we're not going to get into that. You've seen the same open- source reports that I have.

There was less than an hour of notification time before the strikes were conducted. That's not enough time. And this was notification, certainly not coordination as you would expect from a -- a partner and an ally in the fight against ISIS.

And your third question? I'm sorry.

Q: Artillery strikes, you know, from Turkey against the YPG -- today.

COL. DORRIAN: I've seen open source reports on those but I have not seen the evidence of additional strikes. We'd have to circle back with you. I've seen open source reports but I haven't seen any operational reporting on that this afternoon.

Q: Just to clarify, you said less than an hour notice. So was that between 30 minutes and sixty minutes or was it less than 30 minutes notice?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, it was less than an hour they contacted the Combined Air Operations Center.

Q: OK. Thanks.

STAFF: Tara Copp, with Stars and stripes.

Q: Hey, colonel. Just wanted to follow up on some of Missy's questions. After the strikes, did Turkey reach out to its partners to provide any further explanation or did the coalition reach out to Turkey to ask for an explanation of the strikes?

COL. DORRIAN: We let the Turks know that the amount of time that was being provided for the strikes was inadequate for us assure safety of our forces on the ground. We had forces within six miles of the strikes. As far as the effects that they achieved, they killed a significant number of Peshmerga fighters. These are fighters that had been very important to the fight against ISIS and then our partnered forces.

We have not had extensive discussions with regard to them reaching out but I know that there has been a significant amount of diplomatic activity between the two sides since that occurred.

Q: And just for comparison, normal operating procedure if Turkey was conducting an air operation, how would that go?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, I'm not going to get into exactly what all the procedures were. It'd be

inappropriate to that in the interest of operational security. That would provide valuable insight into the enemy on our tactics, techniques and procedures. What I will say though is that it was less than an hour. We believe that's inadequate and it was done as a notification as opposed to coordination.

Q: Thank you.

STAFF: To Laurie Mylroie.

Q: In condemning the Turkish attacks on the Peshmerga, the KRG said that the basis of the problem is that PKK is remaining in Sinjar. Is that a perspective that you would agree with?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, the PKK being anywhere in Iraq or Syria is a problem because they're a terrorist group. As far as whether that's the crux of the problem, we've identified what we think is problematic here and the inadequate coordination time and the notification rather than coordination are two areas that are just not good. And then of course our partnered forces have been killed in this strike and these are forces that have been integral in fighting ISIS, they've been reliable in making progress against ISIS fighters under very difficult and dangerous conditions.

They have made many, many sacrifices to help defeat ISIS and that keeps the whole world safer. So that is our position on that.

Q: And you said that U.S. forces were within six miles of the strike. Are you saying that U.S. forces were potentially endangered by that?

COL. DORRIAN: I'm saying that less than an hour of notification is an inadequate amount of time to have our forces leave the ops box area that was identified. Which was a very large ops box, not enough fidelity for us to assure that they were safe. So it was an unsafe way to conduct operations. It's a very complex battle field here. And we just want to make sure that coordination is done so that we can get these things right and prevent the types of incidents that we saw here, which included the killing of Peshmerga soldiers in Sinjar area.

Q: Question, did you get any assurances at all that something's been done to rectify this problem, it won't happen again?

COL. DORRIAN: I'm not aware of any at this time.

STAFF: OK. Next to Kasim Ileri with Anadolu.

Q: Colonel Dorrian, you said that PKK is a problem wherever it is in Iraq because it's a terrorist group. And then yesterday a group of U.S. forces have been filmed and pictured in -- I'm sorry North East Syria, in the area where struck by a Turkish air elements. And those forces are welcomed by PKK flags, as well as PKK leaders, posters and pictures. So for -- according to

you, isn't it controversial for American forces, being welcomed by supporters and elements of designated terrorist group in that area -- that's PKK?

COL. DORRIAN: Well -- our -- we did have forces that went to check on the partner forces who were harmed by the strikes. So that's what they were doing. They were working with the SDF -- that's our partner force, they've been a reliable force in fighting ISIS throughout Northern Iraq. And indeed have made a tremendous number of sacrifices in order to advance and isolate Raqqa. So that's what we were doing there.

Q: So the -- so you say that it was the SDF elements who were carrying PKK flags, or PKK leader's posters? Or were there PKK elements over there? Are you aware that there is no PKK elements in the area where your forces have been checking or, you know patrolling?

COL. DORRIAN: Well what I'm telling you is that we were there to visit our partnered force. They've been a reliable partner force, and we wanted to make sure that we were there to assess the damage and to assure them that we're committed to our partnership with them, as they continued isolating Raqqa.

Q: Turkish military is saying that they have conducted those strikes based on the intelligence information, that many of the reason, PKK attacks in Turkey have been plotted and supplied with equipment and arms coming from Sinjar region and (inaudible) region. Militarily speaking (inaudible), apart from notification and predicting partner forces, do you think that those targets were actually militarily legitimate targets, because they -- as significant national security threat to that is coming out of those areas -- - those two areas?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah, we believe that our partner forces were struck in North Syria and we believe that Peshmerga forces were killed in Sinjar. Those are the two things that we believe based on what we've seen here. And some of the problem with this was there was not an acceptable level coordination between the two sides.

And not an adequate amount of time given to ensure that that coordination could be done so that we can deconflict operations and make sure that all forces that are fighting ISIS in Northern Syria have the opportunity and remain focused on that.

STAFF: Sure.

Q: Ragip Soylu with Daily Sabah. To follow up on Kasim's question. There is a picture and a video showing that an American -- a senior officer apparently with a -- walking with a PKK officer, a well known commander. His name is (inaudible) yesterday and he has been a top commander in PKK's arm of HPG and he has been in control of the European command for a while, while he was in Europe.

And then he returned to Syria and he was assigned as YPG's and PKK's general commander in the country. And he has been designated as especially a leading terrorist by Turkey and he's

pictured as proof that he's walking with an American officer in Northern Syria. Are you aware of that?

COL. DORRIAN: I'm aware that we had an officer go to Northern Syria to check on our partner force, following the strikes that killed some of their soldiers. And that's what we were there to do. There were a lot of people present that's really all I have for you on that.

Q: Second question, the Turkish Foreign Minister said that they informed United States that they should withdraw their forces from the border at a distance of Turkey kilometer because there was an upcoming Turkish operations in coming days. Like days before those airstrikes. Do you have any information on that? Would you confirm that Turkey informed you that they would conduct operations that specific region?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah, I haven't seen those statements so it'd be inappropriate for me to comment on them.

STAFF: Laurie Mylroie, who I skipped over before.

Q: (off mic) I came up with another question.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: Kurdistan 24, and sir -- Colonel Dorrian, your statement that it's not an acceptable level of coordination. Are you suggesting that if the Turkish forces had coordinated properly with you and told you where they were going to strike and when, would you have let them go ahead and wouldn't you have understood that they're going to strike partner forces in Peshmerga and would have stopped it, told them no, don't strike there

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah I'm not going to get into hypothetical scenarios about what we would or wouldn't have agreed to. What I can say is that it's much better to coordinate properly and assure that these conversations between allies -- stalwart allies for more than 50 years continue to assure that we can keep all of our guns trained on ISIS. That's the most dangerous enemy in the area. And unfortunately, that didn't happen. And as a result, we have this unfortunate set of incidents.

STAFF: OK. To Ryan Browne from CNN.

Q: Hello, colonel. Thank you for doing this. Just one quick on on -- on these Turkish airstrikes.

So, within that hour's notification, were any of the -- you said the coalition forces were within six miles. Did -- were coalition forces moved at all after that notification? Or did they remain in place?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah, I -- I don't know what their movements were. I just know that it was

inadequate amount of time to clear all of our forces away from what is a very significantly sized area.

So, we didn't have exact fidelity on where the strikes would occur. And not an enormous amount of time to have our forces react.

Q: You -- and -- and was there any effort by the part of the coalition to warn -- once that warning was communicated by the Turkish troops, was there any movement to notify the SDF partners of this impending strike within that hour window?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, there's not really enough time to do that within that hour window. And there's not really enough fidelity on exactly who was being struck in order to even consider doing so.

SO, this was a notification that strikes were going to occur against terrorists. You know, NATO ally -- you know, Turkey is a NATO ally. So, there's not really enough information there for us to know exactly who was being struck or exactly where the strikes were going to occur.

So, this was just an unfortunate set of incidents. And it resulted in the deaths of many forces who had been very effective in fighting ISIS.

Q: And -- and on a separate note, I -- last week we talked a little bit with -- about the chemical weapons attack that'd been done on some Iraqi security forces and some of the U.S. and Australia advisors nearby. Is there any update on that -- on what kind of chemical weapon was used in that attack and whether or not any coalition service members were exposed?

(Crosstalk)

COL. DORRIAN: I don't know if you can hear all of this. But it's a near deafening exercise that's going to be done here.

And I need to just take a quick pause while we finish that. Sorry about that.

(Crosstalk)

COL. DORRIAN: Question again, and we'll see whether we can get it answered for you. I apologize for that.

Q: Colonel, totally understand. Thank you that you're fielding the question.

We talked a little bit about the chemical weapon -- series of chemical weapons attacks by ISIS against Iraqi troops and U.S. advisors and Australian advisors nearby last week. Is there any update on what kind of chemical weapons were used in those attacks and whether or not any coalition forces were exposed?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, coalition forces became aware of the chemical attack. They left the area. They donned their equipment. Where they were tested, none of them showed any negative effects from being in that area.

As far as the types of materials that the enemy used they have low grade capabilities in that is representative of chlorine and mustard agent. Sometimes I see that reported as mustard gas, that's not correct. It's mustard agent.

So, it dispersed into a very small area whenever these munitions go off. These munitions are not especially effective about anything except creating a public narrative. So, there not as effective even as explosive rounds but they do get some attention.

STAFF: OK. Next, to Corey Dickstein, Stars and Stripes.

Q: Hi, sir. Ryan actually asked my main question, but I do want to make sure I'm clear on the troops that were six miles from the straight Turkey conducted, those were in Syria no Iraq, correct?

COL. DORRIAN: That's correct.

Q: And then, can you talk a little bit about the isolation effort around Raqqa? How much is left to do to encircle that city? Is ultimately encircling the entire city, is that plan and I guess that's it.

COL. DORRIAN: Yes. More than 8,000 square kilometers have been cleared by our partner force the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian Arab Coalition. As they begin isolating Raqqa. So they have them largely isolated to the north, to the east and to the west.

Some significant clearing operations still have to occur in Tabqah City. That is west of Raqqa. Once that area, which has been a big staging area for ISIS, it's also a place with their main prison and a significant number of fighters. Maybe, somewhere around the order of 700 or so.

Once that area is cleared and, of course, the dam is there which is a source of hydroelectric power. That's the largest dam in Syria. Once that area's been cleared then the cordon, our partner forces have continued to close around Raqqa, they'll continue that effort and get the city where it's really completely isolated to the north, the east and to the west.

All the main roads out of Raqqa will be completely blocked and controlled by them. There is very harsh and difficult to reign to the south. And, of course, this is not a very hospitable area for anybody that wants to try to get out of there.

We'll continue working with partnered forces to disrupt what few enemy would try to go in to that area. So, the city will be completely isolated and then at a time of -- our partner forces choosing, then we'll move in and liberate the city as they've done in many other areas.



Q: How far are the SDF forces from Tabqa dam at this point? Do you have any idea how long -- how much more effort would go into securing that area?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah, just -- just a few kilometers, I believe. I -- I don't have the exact number, but they're very, very close.

OK, another pause. Sorry.

(Crosstalk)

OK, I think we can resume. I don't know if I've got a question hanging there.

STAFF: OK. Next, to Tony Capaccio from Bloomberg.

Q: Hi, John.

I have a non-Turkish question. In the three -- three weeks since the Syria strikes took place, has the Syrian government taken any -- or the Syrian military taken any steps to paint U.S. aircraft, or interfere in any way with the encirclement of Raqqa or U.S. operations in Syria?

COL. DORRIAN: No, I've not observed any. I don't believe so. The -- you know, our aircraft are very capable. You know, we've got F-22s and other very capable aircraft flying over Syria at all times.

So our aircraft are not being threatened at this point, and we haven't seen anything that's -- we would characterize as an attempt to disrupt our partnered forces from trying to isolate Raqqa.

Q: While you mentioned it, the -- the price of the F-22 is still of interest to a lot of people. What is it performing there? It's a stealthy airplane. What kind of missions is it performing in the support of the Mosul and Raqqa operations?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, they do defensive counter-air patrols over Syria, and then they're also capable of dropping munitions, including the small-diameter bomb.

These are very important weapons, especially when you get into dense urban terrain, because it's the 250-pound weapon, much smaller, and can be delivered with precision to create precision effects and destroy targets to make the way for our partnered forces' advance, or to take out enemy leadership targets or targets that have to be struck with precision.

So it's a very important capability, and it's -- it's one that's doing its job here -- you know, in Iraq and Syria.

Q: And one other air -- aircraft question. There's been more concern voiced by the Army about

the use of drones in general against U.S. forces in the future. Can you give us a sense of how ISIL is using drones in the last five or six months in the Mosul operation, and to counter shaping operations in Raqqa?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah. What we've -- what we've seen in Mosul is that the enemy is using commercial, off-the-shelf drones, mainly, but also improvised drones to surveil the areas where the Iraqi security forces are advancing, and they also use them to drop, mainly, grenade-size munitions on the enemy, and on civilian areas.

They're really very indiscriminate about where they're dropping. These are not really strategic capabilities. They're not game changers. It's not going to stop what's happening on the battlefield, which is them losing, being pushed out of areas, and getting killed. But it does present a tremendous amount of danger to people on the ground when we see these.

The enemy has used them, sometimes where multiple drones have been used at one time. Of course, that is a capability that, you know, certainly will get attention and require the Iraqi security forces to take measures to put a stop to that.

Most recently, though, we've been able to provide some capabilities on the battlefield to disrupt that. So that's electronic warfare capabilities. And then, of course, the enemy, you know, is -- is really limited in their technical expertise. So we've got these electronic warfare capabilities. We can't go into a tremendous amount of detail about exactly how that's going to work, but we can move capabilities where they need to be in order to stop the enemy from being more effective.

We've seen a lot fewer munition drops recently, although, you know, occasionally we still do see that. But one of the things that's kind of an interesting conundrum for the enemy is we have the ability to disrupt them when they want to use these. The Iraqi security forces have turned the tables and begun to use them as well. The enemy has no such capability other than to fire at the Iraqi security forces' drones and the Iraqis are seeing some success against the enemy in using these capabilities to take out snipers, to take out improvised explosive -- vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices that are parked, and to just sort of terrorize them.

So, that's -- that's kind of the state of play with regard to enemy use of drones, and then the Iraqis' use of drones as well.

Q: One quick follow-up. Have these counter-technologies been rushed to Iraq over the last five or six months as part of these joint urgent requirements?

COL. DORRIAN: Throughout our tenure here, this has been an issue that leadership has paid attention to. And certainly, we've gotten a significant amount of help from Washington and Tampa to get capabilities into theater to address this threat. Again, all along, everyone recognized that this is not going to change the outcome of the battle. The enemy has been going backwards for more than two years. They're not going to be able to stop the Iraqi security forces. The coalition is going to continue to hammer them with air and artillery strikes until they

are completely and totally defeated in Mosul and other places around Iraq. But that's not a problem that we're just going to leave the enemy to do what they want to do. We're going to take their ability to disrupt any kind of operation or to harm people away. You know, the enemy has been very determined, and sometimes they're creative. So, what we've done is we've worked with the Iraqi security forces. Our forces are more creative than ISIS, I can assure you of that.

And so are the Iraqi security forces. And that's why you see the tables being turned, and the enemy on the back foot.

STAFF: OK. Sam LeGrone.

Q: Hi. Thanks for the time, Colonel Dorrian.

I just want to check on the status of the de-confliction agreement, the MOU with the Russians. Russian state media yesterday reported that they had reaffirmed -- Russia had reaffirmed the tenets of the 2015 MOU. And I was just checking to see with you all what that current status is. Thank you.

COL. DORRIAN: Yes, I've seen those same reports. It's very encouraging that they've acknowledged that. And it is important for safety of flight for our operations and for theirs as we both continue fighting ISIS in Syria, and we continue our operations in Iraq.

That operation, you know, the de-confliction line is indeed -- it has been working really nonstop. And that's something that's going to continue. So that's an encouraging thing to see that acknowledged.

STAFF: OK. Ma'am in the back.

Q: (inaudible) with Al Jazeera-English.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is reporting that in the last 48 hours, at least 16 civilians were killed in coalition airstrikes in the Raqqa countryside. Have you seen those reports? And could you comment on that?

COL. DORRIAN: I didn't catch all of your question. The Syrian Observatory For Human Rights is saying something. I didn't catch -- that's where you broke up.

Q: Saying that in the last 48 hours, at least 16 civilians were killed in coalition airstrikes in the Raqqa countryside. Have you seen those reports? And could you comment on them?

COL. DORRIAN: You know what? I've seen a lot of reports come out. I don't think that I could -- I've seen so many from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights that I don't think that I could comment without seeing the specific one in writing, with a date, time and location. I don't know

that you've given me enough information that I would be able to confirm that.

What I would say, though, is that the conduct of airstrikes and artillery strikes, not one thing has changed with regard to our priority for the protection of civilians. We're doing these strikes to support the Iraqi security forces' advance and our Syrian partners' advance into extraordinarily dangerous territory, fighting an enemy that has murdered tens of thousands of people and driven millions of them from their homes.

I would point out that more than 2.6 million people have been able to return to their homes since the coalition began conducting airstrikes in support of our partners. And I would submit to you that I don't know what the fraction would be of that progress, but it's probably a small fraction without those precision air and artillery strikes. We only use precision-guided munitions. We coordinate all of our strikes with the Iraqi security forces, and gather extensive information before we conduct our strikes.

But these are a solution to the problem that ISIS has posed with their brutal control measures on the people of Syria and the people of Iraq. And we must continue to conduct airstrikes. We'll do so very, very carefully, but the strikes must continue.

Q: I'll see if I can get the precise information to you, but I had a second question, which was I wanted to see if you could give us an update on the status of the investigation into the March 17th strike, in which -- in west Mosul, in which there were reports that up to 300 civilians were killed?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah. We -- we -- we are going to release a report on that strike. That'll be done once it's complete and coordinated with all the appropriate parties and agencies.

Certainly, we'll want to make sure that we've dotted all our I's and crossed all our T's. We have an air force officer, Brigadier General Matt Isler, who's conducting the investigation. He has extensive experience and expertise.

We're going to pause again.

(Crosstalk)

OK. So, General Isler is in the process of finishing up his report on that. And then it'll be coordinated.

What I can tell you is that he visited the site. He's interviewed many, many witnesses. He's done engineering work with our subject matter experts in structures.

He's worked closely with our munitions people to understand what effects the munitions that were used in that area should have created. And he's worked with our intelligence experts to -- to review the -- the surveillance footage that we have available on this.

All those things have been done. And we're going to make sure that it's a very thorough inspection. We will release it. We just don't have the exact timing on that. That's something that we'll owe you as a due out.

Q: Will Brigadier General Isler be available then for questions once the report is published?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, we'll have to owe you an answer on that. I know that we're going to release a report.

Who's going to be there to answer questions is -- remains to be seen. We'll -- we'll get back to you on that.

You know, I would, pulling out, that more extensive efforts to avoid civilian casualties than have ever been done by any coalition in history are being employed over Syria and Iraq. And none of that has changed.

This is a very unfortunate incident. But it -- and it's certainly not the types of effects that we hope to achieve. But the fact remains that there has never been a coalition that's worked more -- more closely with partners, and employed more resources, and done more to avoid civilian casualties than is being done now.

One of the things that's very important to understand is that even with the very best technology ever employed, even with the most robust procedures employed, even with the very best of intentions and the highest level of efforts -- and that's what we put into this -- the people that're involved in this are not perfect, nor is the technology. It's the best that has ever been employed. But, perfection is probably an unachievable goal for all of us.

COL. DORRIAN: Our very best effort is what we seek to achieve. And whenever there's an unfortunate incident in this nature, it's heart breaking. And we will dig into it deeply to try to figure out if something -- what could have been done better, if anything.

And, to takes steps to mitigate the risks. That's -- that is what we can and will do. But, our partners are counting on us to provide air and artillery support. We believe that we have saved many of their lives as they take this very, very dangerous and difficult task of digging into a very entrenched enemy.

And, dislodging them from Iraq's second most populous city and other areas around Iraq and Syria. So, this is some thing that we have to continue. We're going to continue to work on this and we will be very transparent as we have been with the results of our investigations.

STAFF: Kristina Wong, next. Missy, I got you, too.

Q: Hi, J.D. Thank you so much for doing this. Back in the de-confliction with the Russians,

would you say that the U.S. also confirmed the tenets of the MOU?

COL. DORRIAN: I'm not sure I caught all that. Can you repeat the question, Kristina? I'm sorry.

Q: Yes. On the deconfliction with the Russians in Syria would you say that the U.S. also reconfirmed the tenets of the MOU?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, what I would say is we've continued our de-confliction efforts throughout the past weeks and we believe that continued de-confliction of our operations keeps both sides safer on the battle field.

It's a very complex environment and we have continued our efforts to try to make things as safe as they can be given the very complex and difficult set of circumstances that we have over Syria.

It's probably not my place to commit us to anything. That's probably the role of someone in Washington. But, I can tell you all of that.

Q: And then, secondly, do the Turkish air strikes in Iraq make it more risky for U.S. and Coalition Forces to operate with Kurdish Peshmerga there and how will that risk be mitigated?

COL. DORRIAN: I'm sorry you broke up another time there. Can you repeat that question again for me?

Q: Sorry. It might just be me. Do the Turkish air strikes in Syria make it more risky for U.S. or coalition forces to operate with the Kurdish Peshmerga and how will that risk be mitigated going forward?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, we continue working with our partner forces in Syria and Iraq with regard to de-confliction and coordination. What we would say is if we follow the procedures that are in place and do appropriate coordination then we believe we can conduct operations safely.

And, continue focusing on defeating ISIS which is the biggest threat to the region and to the world.

Q: (Inaudible) -- Peshmerga's ability to fight ISIS and in earlier did you say ops box as in operations box?

COL. DORRIAN: Yeah we call it Ops Box North. So this is an area of operations north of Raqqa that's defense techno babble so I apologize for that. That is just our operations area in the north above Raqqa where our partner forces are operating and clearing to isolate the city.

Q: Just really quickly on -- did the Turkish airstrikes in Iraq hurt the Peshmerga's ability to fight ISIS?

COL. DORRIAN: Well five people were unfortunately killed. These were fighters that were doing their part to fight ISIS so that does hurt the Peshmerga's ability when they start to lose fighters unnecessarily because of uncoordinated operations.

STAFF: And next to Richard Sisk from Military.com.

Q: Hi colonel, can you tell us did U.S. forces in Syria provide any medevacs, provide any medical assistance for those YPG who may have been injured by the Turkish airstrikes?

COL. DORRIAN: We didn't medevac anyone.

Q: One more, colonel can you say is there a concern that CJTF that these Turkish airstrikes might have an impact on the ability or the willingness of the YPG to continue in the drive on Raqqa when they're being attacked by U.S. NATO ally?

COL. DORRIAN: Well what we've seen since the attacks on the SDF were done is that they've cleared more than 200 square kilometers of territory in the north of Raqqa to further isolate that city. So they've also continued their advance into Tabqa which is very difficult and dangerous territory with a lot of very tough ISIS fighters, including a lot of foreign fighters.

So they have proven to be a very reliable partner in fighting ISIS. That is what we've observed to date. So I'm not going to speculate about what else might happen, but I am going to tell you what we've observed so far.

STAFF: Next to Jim Michaels, USA Today

Q: Colonel Dorrian, I understand that this was a notification and not coordination on the part of the Turks regarding the airstrikes. But did the coalition have any chance to respond at all? In other words, what was their reaction, did they ask that it be postponed or cease? Just what was the coalition reaction immediately to that notification?

COL. DORRIAN: We did tell them that this was a notification and not coordination and that it was not enough time to conduct operations safely.

Q: And a quick follow-on on Syria. Could you sort of -- a quick follow-on on Syria, if you could sort of describe the level of coalition support currently for the Tabqa Dam offensive?

COL. DORRIAN: Certainly. We have coalition advisers with the partner force -- with our partner forces, the SDF and the Syrian Arab Coalition. So we continue to provide them our advice and assistance as they advance in to that very difficult terrain.

We continue to take ISIS fighters, fighting positions, and weapons and resources off the battlefield through our air and artillery strikes all over Iraq and Syria, including in Tabqa.

And then we provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and observe the battlefield to make sure that we're achieving the effects that we intend.

STAFF: Next to Kasim. Did you have a follow-up?

Q: Colonel Dorrian, please could you clarify some of the statements you made earlier? You said that the problem with the Turkish strikes were lack of notification and coordination, and then the casualties of the partnered forces. So does that implicitly mean that the coalition or the U.S. military recognizes the Turkish -- the Turkish counterparts or Turkish partners' concerns with respect to the PKK bases in Iraq and in northern Syria?

COL. DORRIAN: I'm not sure I caught all that question.

Q: So, you said that (inaudible). You said that (inaudible).

STAFF: Can you hear us here J.D.?

COL. DORRIAN: OK, I've got you. Sorry. Much better now.

STAFF: Thank you.

Q: You -- you said that the problem with the Turkish strikes was that it was not coordinated; it was not notified with, you know, enough time. And then the partner forces were unfortunately, you know, being killed. So, does that statement implicitly mean that you recognize -- actually, you recognize the Turkish legitimate concerns with respect to the PKK presence in Iraq and in Syria?

COL. DORRIAN: No. We acknowledge that there are PKK in some areas of Iraq and northern Syria. What we're saying is that these strikes didn't provide adequate time and coordination to assure that that's who's being struck. So, the Syrian Democratic Forces were struck. This is a force that's been instrumental in defeating ISIS in many areas all around Syria, and then, of course, the unfortunate death of several Peshmerga fighters in Iraq.

And Iraq's sovereignty was also not respected here. We believe that every force that's fighting terrorism in Iraq should be doing so in coordination and with the agreement and cooperation of the government of Iraq. And that's not what happened here.

Q: Just one -- one other follow-up. Turkish military is saying that they have tracked some of the arms provided by the coalition to the anti-ISIS partners, being transferred to the PKK elements inside Turkey, and many of those arms from Syria found their way to Turkey from the two areas struck by the Turkish jets the other day.

So I do -- it's understandable that you cannot account for every single arm you have provided,



but do you have anything to refute their claims that some of the arms provided by the coalition found their way to the PKK elements, as there is a presence of PKK inside Syria and inside northern Iraq?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, to be clear, we provide weapons and equipment to the Syrian Arab Coalition, not the YPG. These are forces that have proven reliable. We haven't seen them threaten Turkey at all. We've seen them fight ISIS. We've seen them liberate more than 8,000 square kilometers of territory in isolating Raqqa. We've seen them liberate Manbij, which was a dangerous command and control node for international terrorism.

We've seen very good progress made in the defeat of ISIS by our partnered force. So that's what we've observed. We have not observed the things that you're alleging at all.

STAFF: Next to Tara Kopp, Stars and Stripes, for a follow-up.

Q: Thanks for hanging in there with us.

Back to the de-confliction line. So, are you confirming that the line is open and operating? And when was the last time that coalition and their Russian counterparts spoke on the line?

COL. DORRIAN: Well, we are going to discuss the fact that there has been de-confliction going on all along. But probably going to end it there as far as the daily play-by-play on what was de-conflicted and what was not and who said what in these calls. We are not going to get back into that business.

So, we have been de-conflicting all along and we continue (inaudible).

(CROSSTALK)

COL. DORRIAN: OK, we're at "Endex," folks, so we can answer questions now.

Q: Just a quick follow-up. I'm not asking about the content of the calls. I'm just confirming that calls have taken place today, yesterday, between coalition and their Russian counterparts.

COL. DORRIAN: Yes. The calls happen on an as-needed basis, on a regular basis. And we're not going to talk about every little time that it happens.

STAFF: Last follow-up here from Missy Ryan.

Q: Yes, just to clarify. Did you say when you were answering Ryan that the Turks had not provided the location of the airstrikes that they were going to conduct when they provided the notification, not de-confliction? And also, did you say that you had not seen the Turkish foreign ministry statement rebutting the American criticism of the strikes?

COL. DORRIAN: We -- we -- what I'm saying is that the size of the area in which the operations are going to occur didn't leave enough time to assure that our forces could be out of the way or really understand exactly where those strikes were going to be. That's what I'm saying. As far as the other part, have I seen a statement, I think I need you to repeat that.

Q: There was a Turkish Foreign Ministry -- the Turkish government put out statements from the Foreign Ministry rebutting the American criticism of the notification process.

COL. DORRIAN: I haven't seen those statements.

STAFF: OK. Ladies and gentlemen. That's all we have time for. J.D., thank you very much for your time. Did you have anything else for us before you signed off?

COL. DORRIAN: No. We'll see you next week.

STAFF: All right. Thank you. Thank you, everybody.